

Beginning of the end by pamthoseweregreatpumps

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Summary: Because Joyce and Hopper deserved so much more screen time and cuteness together. This is a story that explores their relationship, past and present. Starts at the end of season 2. Let's see where my imagination takes them. Just trying to stay alive until Jopper becomes canon in season 4.

1. Chapter 1

As soon as Hopper had dropped Eleven off at the Snow Ball his first instinct told him to go and look for Joyce. He assumed she would be nearby, watching over Will from a distance and being ready to take him home. He wasn't particularly surprised when he spotted her outside, leaning on a car.

"Hey", he said as he approached her from the shadows. She turned her head and gave a weak "hey" back.

"Thought I might find you out here" he said, still approaching her slowly.

"Will wanted me to give him some space, so.. I'm giving him a few feet." she replied and gestured towards the general direction of where their kids were. Hopper pulled out his usual pack of cigarettes and said, with a mischievous smile, "What do you say? I'm pretty sure that Mr Cooper retired in the 70's so.. We might be okay."

Joyce looked up at him with a tender look and took the cigarette. She inhaled and as usual with his damned cigarettes she coughed a little, which made him laugh.

"How are you holding up?" he asked her, trying to keep his tone as neutral as possible.

"You know." she replied, making it clear that that was as much as she intended to say about the matter today. He didn't have any wish to push her further but still felt the need to close the conversation.

"Yeah. That feeling never goes away. It is true what they say, you know. Every day it does get a little easier."

She looked up at him with a sadness in her eyes that they both knew there was no quick fix for, but nevertheless his words had a calming effect on her, as usual. As he wrapped his arm around her she leaned into his chest, exhaling as she did so, letting go of a little bit of the weight she was carrying. Hopper felt his chest tighten at the touch of her and he couldn't resist placing his head on top of hers, breathing

her in for just a second. As he felt her hand coming up to grab his he wished to freeze this moment forever. They had barely seen each other the past month. Which was no doubt understandable, they both had their separate things to deal with, but he still couldn't help the fact that he had missed her. Missed her and been terrified of the fact that he missed her. Knowing that seeing her would probably not do her any good right now. Knowing that he had to focus on Eleven, knowing that she had to focus on her children and on herself. All these things made him want to freeze this moment even more. He felt himself shiver as Joyce let go of his hand and instead placed it on his chest, under his jacket. Her other hand followed and as she wrapped her arms around his waist she practically disappeared under his jacket, as she was much smaller than he was.

"My hands are freezing, do you mind?" she asked, not so much of a question rather than a statement seeing that she was already getting comfortable in there but he didn't mind at all.

"Make yourself at home." he chuckled and tightened his hold around her. She gave him just a hint of a smile as she looked up at him before she buried her head in his chest. Not knowing how long she intended to stay in his jacket but not wanting to push her to get out of there Hopper decided to just go with it. Leave her be, after all she had had enough to deal with and if she needed a good hug who was he to turn her down? He couldn't deny that it was a little bit distracting, having her so close. He could feel her freezing hands, because yes they had been freezing when she initially ventured into his jacket, warming up and as they did she slowly started tracing patterns up and down his back. Just the feathery light touches of her fingertips was enough to bring back memories from the past, from *that night*, and although he didn't know her intentions at this point his last wish was to break any boundaries with her. So he didn't move, didn't flinch and most certainly didn't just grab her and kiss her, as he would have really liked to do. He didn't know if he would call it love, maybe not yet, but it was certainly something. He felt something for her, and he could try to push that away all he liked but it wouldn't do any good. Having her so near him warmed him up, from the inside and out. He had a feeling he had a rather sheepish expression on his face because he could feel himself go a few shades darker when he heard Jonathan's voice calling out from not far away.

"Mom, are you there? It's time to go home."

Hopper looked up a split second before Joyce emerged from his jacket and caught the look Jonathan was giving him. The kid was hard to read at the best of times but Hopper was sure the look he received wasn't an altogether nice one. Suspicious at best.

"Yes honey, I'm coming!", Joyce replied as she untangled herself from Hopper's embrace. He felt a chill as he lost contact with her body and another one when one of her hands lingered on his chest.

"Thanks for warming me up." she said, and as she didn't move her hand he looked down on it questioningly. She blushed and removed it, as if she hadn't realized it was there in the first place. *I'm such an idiot*, he thought.

"I'll see you around, okay?" he half said and half asked, not really expecting an answer as she was already starting to walk away. To his surprise she turned and gave him a smile and a nod.

"Yeah, see you around Hopper." she said, before turning around again and walking away.

2. Chapter 2

A few days passed without them seeing each other. Hopper went back to his usual business, fathering an increasingly questioning and curious girl, and Joyce went back to trying to accustom to this new, *normal*, life. Christmas was getting closer and with that came a feeling of.. Well, she wasn't entirely sure. Joyce couldn't help but feeling a mixture of so many things. She was happy, of course, that they were here together, her and her two boys. That they got to have a Christmas. That Will was finally safe. But she felt a sting whenever she thought of Bob. Or of how close all of them had been to dying, really. That fear she was sure would never leave her. As would the memory of watching Bob getting torn to shreds. But as the months crept by she decided she had to move on from that heavy, sad feeling. He had been lovely, so lovely, to her. But he was gone. She knew she had to move on, if not for any other reason than that she had to be there for her kids. She had promised herself a long time ago to never become emotionally unavailable to them ever again. She had to stay in the present, not dwell in the past. As she brought the Christmas decorations from the basement she spotted the boys in the living room, having a vivid discussion about something she couldn't understand half of. Nevertheless they were completely absorbed and their waving of hands and laughing brought a smile to her face. She placed the heavy box of decorations on top of the dinner table and started putting everything in their usual spots around the house. The task calmed her and she found herself drifting off to a peaceful place in her mind until her hand landed on a very ugly gnome. As she grabbed it she felt herself blush as the memories of a certain night came back to her. She remembered everything vividly, although it had been.. Well almost exactly a year. She squeezed the ugly little thing as she allowed herself to drift off into her memories.

She remembered going to his house on Boxing day with some left-over Christmas cake that she had made. Even at that point she hadn't been entirely sure if it was as a thank you for saving her child's life or because she just wanted to see him. Nevertheless she had found herself knocking on his door in the late afternoon, just as the sun was about to set. She had been drinking. Not too much, but just the right amount to give her the courage to do this. He had opened the door very quickly, almost as if he

was expecting someone, and for a moment she had felt rather obvious. Coming to his house with cake, what was she thinking.

"Well hello there, merry Christmas", he said with a smile. His breath smelled of whiskey and for a moment she was grateful they were both in the same state of mind.

"Hi, yes merry Christmas, eh, can I come in?" she had said rather awkwardly, holding the tray wrapped in baking paper in her hands. "Cake. For you." she added when he looked at what she was holding rather puzzled.

"Yes, yes of course, come on in." he said and moved out of the doorway to let her pass.

She sighed with relief as she was somehow not sure he would let her in and walked straight to the kitchen where she put the cake on the table with a heavy thud. He followed her with a curious look, no doubt wondering what had brought her out to his house in the middle of Christmas celebrations.

"How's Will doing?" he asked her, as if to take some of the tension from the air with a relatively easy question.

"Oh, good, he's good. Actually.. That's kind of why I'm here." she said. He looked at her with a puzzled look as he sipped some more of his whiskey. He picked out a second glass and poured her a drink without even asking if she wanted one, maybe he just felt that she needed it. She nodded as a thank you and took a sip before speaking.

"To say thank you, for helping me to bring him back. You really didn't have to go to all that trouble for us but you did, and it helped save his life." she said, and quickly added: "I really couldn't have done any of it without you."

He looked at her and smiled one of his boyish smiles, ran his hand through his hair and finally said:

"Joyce, you don't have to thank me, you know I'll always be here for you and your boys."

She suddenly felt herself verging on tears, she felt so grateful to him for

what he had done and he brushed it off like it was nothing, which made her feel even more grateful. She didn't know if it was her feelings for him that were becoming increasingly complicated or the alcohol. Maybe a combination of both.

"Hey, hey, don't cry, I'm sorry I didn't mean to make you cry", he said hurriedly as he closed up the space between them and hugged her. His big arms wrapped around her so easily.

"No I'm sorry, I don't know why I'm crying, it just happens a lot recently, I'm such a mess and.." she started but he cut her off by placing his index finger on her lips.

"It's okay Joyce, it's okay." he said as he moved his finger from her lips to putting a strand of hair behind her ear. "You don't have to apologize to me, ever. Do you hear me?" he added as he grabbed her by the shoulders and leaned back on the kitchen counter to get closer to her eye level.

"I know what you've been through, I get it. It's been hell. I can't imagine. Everyone thought you were crazy, and all you wanted was to find your boy. But you're not crazy Joyce, you never were, I'm just sorry I didn't believe you from the beginning because then I could have..."

She abruptly cut him off when she freed herself from his arms, pushed herself forward and kissed him. It was just on the lips, and she pulled away after only a few seconds but of course it silenced Hopper instantly.

"So if the cake was the thank you, then what was that?" he asked her in a teasing tone.

"Oh, shut up.." she said and slowly inched herself closer to him, trapping him between her body and the counter he was leaning on. She looked at him daringly as she took her glass of whiskey and downed it all. He laughed a little and did she same. She gave out a surprised squeak when he grabbed her, turned them both around and put her on top of the kitchen counter.

"Well whatever it was" he said huskily as he pushed himself in between her legs, forcing them to spread open, to get even closer to her, "I enjoyed it very much."

She blushed as he felt his large hands squeeze her thighs gently as he leaned in and went for another kiss. This time it wasn't just on the lips, and it didn't last only a few seconds. Her hands were roaming all over his back, desperately, scratching and clawing at him as he kissed her senseless. She felt his hands travel from her thighs to cup her face, then moving down her sides, her waist, and she couldn't suppress a moan as he cupped her breasts and pushed himself even closer to her. She couldn't deny that she wanted this.. Because she did. Every single part of her body did. But somewhere deep in her mind alarms began to ring. They had never spoken of their feelings for one another, if there even were any, and she wasn't so sure she wanted to become another one of his conquests. No matter how badly she craved him right now.

"Hopper.." she tried to free herself, but the way she whispered his name it came out sounding more like a moan and she cursed herself for being so turned on by him she was ready to burst.

"Hopper!" she repeated, more seriously and more sober this time, and as he was awoken from their moment of lust he shifted their position a few centimeters and Joyce suddenly felt a sharp twinge of pain. She cried out and he lifted her off the counter instantly, forcing her to wrap her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist as he grabbed onto her thighs.

"What was that?!" she asked with a high pitched tone and looked down on the counter in hopes of finding the source of her pain.

"I think you just sat on my gnome." he laughed, making her bounce on his chest.

"Your what?" she said, rather confused and not sure if she had heard him right or not. Hopper however was in another dimension, laughing away, and he only stopped when she freed herself from his hands and slid back down on the floor.

"My gnome, look." he said, as he picked up a decoration from the counter that she no doubt had sat down on by accident.

"He's rather ugly, isn't he?" she said and couldn't help but giggle as Hopper made sad face. She looked deep into his eyes and they shared a moment of understanding.

"Hopper, I'm sorry.. I don't think I can do this." she said weakly. She cursed herself for coming here and throwing herself at him and then backing away. She must look really pathetic. The truth was that she didn't know what she was doing here in the first place. Neither of them could deny the tension between them at this point but she didn't know where it would lead them. A relationship? Casual sex? Or just mess and disappointment? She was woken from her musings when Hopper said:

"Hey, are you okay? It's okay Joyce, we can just leave it at this."

She looked up at him and suddenly felt grateful. She somehow knew this wouldn't make things weird between them and that what she and Hopper had been through together gave them a certain understanding of each other.

"Yeah I'm fine, really, it's just.. A confusing time for me. I really just wanted to give you some cake and thank you." she said and he raised his eyebrow slightly at the last part but the look she gave him silenced whatever witty remark he was about to make.

"Take him." Hopper said, and for a moment she didn't really follow what he was saying, but then she saw he was holding the gnome and motioning for her to take him. She couldn't help but laugh.

"You want me to take your gnome?" she asked, not sure why he would even want to give it to her.

"Yeah, it's my Christmas present for you." he replied, clearly not about to change his mind, still motioning for her to take it.

"Well alright then, I'm not about to turn down a present, even if it is rather ugly and probably will leave me with a bruise on my ass." she said and as he laughed, she laughed with him. He opened his hand and as she was about to take it from him he placed his other hand on top of hers, trapping it there momentarily.

"Everything's going to be fine, Joyce. Trust me." he said as he released her hand with a smile.

"What's that thing? It's so ugly!" Eleven's high pitched voice woke Joyce from her reminiscing and she was suddenly aware that she

wasn't alone anymore. God knows how long she had been standing there, holding onto that ugly gnome and dreaming about last Christmas. Long enough to completely forget that Hopper was supposed to bring Eleven over for a sleepover. As it turned out, Will and Eleven had become quite close friends. She figured they both felt somewhat like outcasts, in the best of ways as she was sure their friends were good to them, and that that was why they had such a good connection. And Joyce also suspected Hopper felt more safe leaving Eleven with her than any of the other parents, so when the children asked if Eleven could stay over one night she didn't see why not.

"Oh, hi there honey I didn't hear you coming in.." Joyce started but she trailed off when Hopper also entered the kitchen, his eyes immediately landing on the gnome she was holding. He chuckled a little and winked at her, as if daring her to tell Eleven the story of how the gnome came to be in her possession.

"Actually, it was a present from your father." she said, matter-of-factly, giving Hopper a killing glare.

"Why would you give her that?" Eleven said and gave her father a disapproving look, to which Hopper just shrugged his shoulders, apparently used to being questioned and ambushed. He didn't have to answer her as she heard Will calling her name and instantly went to search for her friend.

"You kept it, huh." Hopper said as he sat down in one of the chairs.

"Of course!" she replied and gave him a warm smile. He was after all one of the more constant people in her life. They had been through thick and thin together, so many memories shared and she was sure that without each other they wouldn't still be alive. They shared a look and she rolled her eyes at him as she turned around to start to prepare their dinner.

Jonathan entered the kitchen and found his mother busy making dinner and Hopper.. staring at her, with a goofy smile on his face and he could swear he heard his mother giggle, no doubt in response to something funny he had said. It wasn't that he disliked Hopper, in fact he couldn't justify that at all since he had played a big part in

keeping his family safe, but he just didn't like the way he seemed to *like* his mom. Because it was rather obvious, at least to Jonathan, that Hopper had a thing for her. From the way he looked at her, spoke to her, and the way he had found them hugging the other day.. Of course it wasn't any of his business, but he didn't want his mom to get hurt. And although Hopper was no doubt good at saving lives and risking his, he wasn't sure how good he would be as a boyfriend. Especially not for his mom.

"Are you staying for dinner?" Jonathan asked him, and Hopper jumped a bit as he realized Jonathan had caught him staring at Joyce. He met the young man's gaze and any hopes of that he wouldn't have noticed disappeared instantly. *That's great, the kid hates me already*, he thought to himself.

"No, duty calls unfortunately." he replied briskly, hoping to redeem himself a bit in any way that he could. It didn't help that Joyce turned around, seemingly unaware of the tension between Hopper and her son, and walked up to him where he was seated and gave him a joking punch in the chest.

"We've hardly seen you lately, next time you stay and eat with us okay?" she said and waved a goodbye in the air as he got up and she got back to making dinner.

"I'll try my best." he replied as he started to make his way out. Jonathan gave him a small smile and a nod, which he returned, but Hopper still left with the feeling that the boy didn't like him being there at all.

3. Chapter 3

Finding that gnome brought back a lot of feelings for Joyce. She had been right one year ago in thinking that things would not get weird between them, because they hadn't. She had felt a little bad for Hopper when she started going out with Bob, not because she thought Hopper necessarily wanted her, but because.. Well, she couldn't quite put her finger on it. That didn't make a difference in how he was there for her and her family though. He had still been there for them, relentlessly, through everything. She remembered a conversation they had, just a few months ago, before things had escalated, before Bob had even been involved in all of it. Hopper insisted on coming with her and Will to all the doctors appointments at Hawkins lab. Again, he didn't have to do that, but he did it anyway. This particular time she recalled he had asked her how "Bob the brain" was, something that made her laugh a bit before she had felt bad and asked him not to call him that, but nevertheless she had told him that he was good, that they were good. Hopper's words were still fresh in her memory.

"Good. I'm happy for you. Really. Hey... Things get worse, you call me first. You call me." She shivered. Things did get worse after that. Much worse. Yet, Hopper was always there. He almost got killed being there and trying to help her solve the mysteries surrounding her son. She remembered how she had been struck with panic when Will had told her that he had seen Hopper and that he thought he was going to die. The fear, desperation and panic she had felt when she thought she might lose him overcame her still. How he had breathlessly said her name after she and Bob had managed to free him and save his life. It was hard to know what to make of it. She sighed and shifted in the couch, trying to find a comfortable spot. She realized yet again that she had completely lost focus on the book she was trying to read. She could hear Will and Eleven talking and laughing from his room and Jonathan had gone out so she was left to her own devices. As it was Christmas holidays neither of the children had to go to school, not that Eleven usually went to school anyway, so they had spent the better part of the day at the Byer's house after their sleepover. Joyce felt at ease, hearing the two of them laughing together. Finally some normality in that poor girls life, and finally her Will was safe. Whenever she had that thought she instantly got scared. Scared that

she might be wrong, that it wasn't all over. She tried to forget her train of thought by diving back into her book. She wasn't sure if she really succeeded or not, as the hours passed by she only managed to turn a few pages. Jonathan had called and said he would be staying over at the Wheeler's tonight and the fact that he received permission to do it from Nancy's parents shocked Joyce enough not to argue with it. After giving Will and Eleven some dinner she heard the noises fade from Will's room and assumed they were both asleep. It was getting rather late. Hopper never specified what time he would come around to pick up El and she didn't see any point in trying to reach him and ask. It's not like she had any plans and she enjoyed having the girl here. She found herself struggling to focus on her book as sleep started to overtake her. A knock on the door made her get up. Hopper was standing outside with frost in his beard and a red nose. She couldn't stop herself from giggling a little as he reminded her of Rudolf the red nosed reindeer. Or at least a grumpy, bearded version of him.

"What's so funny about a man almost frozen to death?" Hopper said with a dry tone and she made an apologetic face as she let him inside.

"Sorry, long day at work?" she asked as he took off his coat and hat and rubbed his hands together. He really did look deep frozen.

"Yeah, you could say that.. Patrolling around all day looking for a silly old dog that was hiding under his owners couch. The things I do for this bloody town.. I can't feel my toes or my fingers." he said grumpily and Joyce couldn't help but smile. *He really is rather cute when he's grumpy*, she thought to herself as she yawned.

"I'll just grab El and we'll be out of your hair." Hopper said but Joyce shook her head.

"Hey, don't be silly. The kids are asleep already and you're right, you do look almost frozen to death. Let's warm you up before you go home." she said and put her hand on his arm, guiding him towards the couch. Hopper broke out of his cold and grumpy state the moment her hand touched his arm. She motioned for him to sit down on the couch and started to take off his shoes.

"Take off that sweater too, it's all cold and we need to get you warm again." she said and he followed her orders, amazed by how swiftly she removed his shoes and socks before wrapping a blanket around his feet. When she finished with his feet she grabbed another blanket from the couch, wrapped it around his shoulders and started to move her hands up and down along his arms in the hopes of waking up his freezing body. As he felt the heat return to his frozen limbs Hopper suddenly felt rather guilty for his grumpy arrival but decided to leave it alone as it didn't seem to bother Joyce. *I'll make it up to her later somehow*, he thought.

"There, is that better?" she said as she stopped rubbing his arms and sat down on the couch next to him, snuggling up slightly against his shoulder. He smiled to himself, nodded his head and said:

"Yeah that's much better, thanks."

They sat in silence for a while and just as Hopper was about to get up and take El home he noticed that Joyce had fallen asleep on his shoulder. *My god, she's beautiful*. That was all he could really think about at that moment. He shifted them slightly so he was able to put the blanket around her too and couldn't help but smile as her hands found their way to his chest, grabbing a hold of him, in her sleep. *Well that's it*, he thought, *I'm sleeping over here then*. There was no way he was going to wake her up and disturb her sleep. Hopper made himself as comfortable as he could on the couch, put an arm around her and closed his eyes.

It was Joyce who woke up first, only a few hours later, because she was cold. Although half wrapped in a blanket it was a poor substitute for the warmth of her own bed and as she shifted she realized she had her arms wrapped around something, someone. It only took her a few seconds to realize it was Hopper. Hopper was sleeping, on her couch, with his arm around her waist. She remembered trying to warm him up but not much more after that, she supposed they must have both dozed off. He was fast asleep by the looks of it and she glanced at the clock. 4 am in the morning. She groaned as she felt her neck was in pain from the strange position she had been sleeping in and the sound woke Hopper up.

"Fuck.." he muttered, "What time is it?"

"About 4." she replied with a yawn and as they started to untangle themselves from each other and the blankets Hopper said:

"Help me get El to the car, I'll just.."

"Don't be ridiculous Hopper," she interrupted "it's in the middle of the night. You might as well stay here. Come on."

She got up and motioned for him to follow her. Dumbstruck he didn't move, he just gave her a questioning look.

"Come on, we can share my bed. You'll break your neck if you try to sleep on the couch you're way too tall." she said matter-of-factly and walked in the direction of her bedroom, with Hopper not far behind her. He couldn't quite believe how easygoing she was about the two of them sleeping in the same bed, but then he figured after all the hell they had been through together this wouldn't be the strangest situation they had faced and it was 4 in the morning after all. He went to the bathroom as she changed into her pajamas and when he came back she was already in the bed. As he moved to get in and join her Joyce suddenly stopped him.

"No, no, no. You're not climbing into my bed with those dirty trousers, they come off first." she said as she put her hand on top of the cover, preventing him from sitting down. He looked at her half amused and half mortified.

"You want me to take my trousers off?" he repeated.

"Yes, Hopper, I want you to take your trousers off *please*." she repeated yet again before removing her hand, giving him permission to join her once the task was complete. As he started to take them off she rolled over and gave him her back, presumably to give him some privacy. Once the trousers were on the floor Hopper finally got in under the covers. He turned so he was facing Joyce's back. There was only a few centimeters between them and he could feel the heat radiating from her body. Suddenly he felt something not so hot as one of her feet came in contact with his ankle.

"*Jesus*, Joyce! Your feet are like icicles!" he gasped and she giggled as she placed her feet purposely on his legs. He felt rather exposed as he

was only wearing his boxers but that feeling quickly changed when he felt her shift on the bed and move her back up against his chest.

"You better warm me up then." she mumbled. She was so close that he could smell her, feel her breathing and most of all, feel her body as it pushed up against his. He had to fight every urge not to roam his hands all over her, and he was sure she was torturing him on purpose when she moved her lower body against him. As he placed one arm over hers to hold her closer he felt her searching for his hand. She found it, grabbed it and he squeezed it back.

"Joyce.." he whispered, but she interrupted him.

"Shh, Hopper. I know. I know." she said, her voice almost like a whisper, and it was clear that she was about to fall asleep. She tightened her grip on his hand.

"I know." she whispered again. As she felt herself drifting off into sleep she wasn't sure what was going on with her. She felt on one hand that it was so natural with Hopper, so easy. After all they had been through it seemed only fit they should end up together. She liked him. Actually she more than just *liked* him, it was just hard to admit it to herself. They spoke about many things but never their feelings for each other. Of course she suspected that he felt something of a similar nature, but she couldn't help feeling scared. Scared that he might not feel that way, scared that she might just be another one of his girls. Although she knew deep down that wasn't the case. None of that seemed to matter right now though. All she cared about was how good it felt to fall asleep so close to him with his arm around her. She felt safe.

4. Chapter 4

Jonathan made his way home the following morning after spending the night at the Wheeler's house. It seemed that at least Karen had warmed up to the idea of him and she had agreed to let him spend the night, but made a point of setting up the spare bed in Nancy's bedroom for him to sleep in. Which is where he started the night, but not where he actually ended up. He had an early breakfast with the family as they were headed out to visit some relatives and then left them to it. As he pulled into the driveway he saw Hopper's car parked there. He thought it a bit odd, since he was supposed to come and collect Eleven yesterday afternoon and it was now 8 in the morning, but didn't think much of it. *Maybe Eleven spent another night*, he thought as he walked up to the house. When he opened the front door he was met with silence, clearly no one else was awake. *So what was Hopper's car doing outside if everyone was asleep..?* He spotted what he assumed was Hopper's shoes and various clothes on the couch and floor in the living room but he couldn't see Hopper himself anywhere. He peeked into Will's room and saw him and El fast asleep. He checked the kitchen and the bathroom, and his own room, before finally stopping outside of his mothers room. He noticed the door was slightly ajar and although he knew it was none of his business and he probably would regret it, he couldn't help but take a look inside. The first thing he noticed was Hopper's trousers on the floor. As his eyes wandered up he found Hopper, sleeping on his back, and his mother sleeping practically on top of him, his arms wrapped around her and her arms on his chest. They looked.. peaceful, Jonathan thought to himself and he was just about to close the gap of the door when he heard a voice behind him.

"What are they doing in there together?"

It was Will. He knew his brother to be a light sleeper but how he had managed to wake him up this time he didn't know.

"They're just sleeping, Will. Let's go and grab some breakfast." Jonathan replied, trying to sound assertive and casual but as always Will picked up on everything.

"I can see that.. I meant why is Hopper sleeping with mom?" he

asked. As if Jonathan would know.

"I don't know, Will. I don't know." he replied and smiled at his brother as he closed the door slowly, trying to end the conversation as he didn't know how to finish it. Suddenly Eleven appeared, yawning and slightly confused as to why she had gotten to spend another night at Will's.

"Where's Hopper? He didn't pick me up." she said and looked at the two boys standing in front of their mothers bedroom door.

"Hopper is in there, with my mom." Will said and pointed at the door Jonathan had just closed. Eleven looked puzzled.

"What are they doing in there?" she asked and Jonathan sighed as the same question he didn't know how to answer was asked a second time this morning.

Suddenly Will and Eleven exchanged a look and giggled. Jonathan managed to roll his eyes despite being slightly uncomfortable.

"Guys come on, let's give them some privacy. Breakfast time." he said and pointed in the direction of the kitchen.

"Do you think they kissed?" Eleven asked Will curiously, having very recently gotten a crash course in romance and relationships by her new friend Max.

"Do you think they.. you know?" Will asked, topping Eleven's question and causing them both to giggle again before Jonathan grabbed a hold of them both and guided them towards the kitchen. The last thing he wanted was a mental image of Hopper all over his mother. He was relieved that the kids seemed to be so easy going with the fact that their parents might be hitting it off. But he was still bothered by the fact that it seemed to be happening. He knew Hopper's type. He was no Bob, he was a Lonnie. Sleeping around, drinking, cursing. Jonathan may not have liked Bob's dorky personality, but at least he kept his mom safe and happy. He wasn't so sure Hopper could do the same for her. Nevertheless, the task of keeping both kids at the table and feeding them slowly made his mind wander to other places.

Joyce woke up by the sound of dishes clattering and talking coming from the kitchen. As she became aware of her surroundings she realized she was nestled on top of Hopper with his arms wrapped securely around her. She smiled as she breathed in the scent of him. This little moment of peace and quiet wouldn't last long and she wanted to savor it. She suddenly remembered that half of Hopper's clothes were still abandoned in the living room and the fact that they were both missing from the breakfast table surely hadn't gone unnoticed. She groaned at the thought of having to explain this to the kids before having her first morning coffee but couldn't suppress a giggle coming out not soon after. It really didn't bother her that much. Hopper was still sleeping soundly, not bothered by her ministrations as she tried to free herself from his arms. He wouldn't let her go though. She tried yet again and failed to free herself, he was holding on for dear life.

"Hopper." she whispered as she grazed her hand over his chest. When he didn't react she pinched his arm.

"*Hopper!*" she whispered again, slightly louder.

He finally seemed to respond somewhat and suddenly opened his eyes. As her face was mere centimeters from his their eyes locked together. He smiled instantly, his eyes glistening as he did so.

"Good morning." she said, returning the smile and patting him on the shoulder as she finally freed herself and sat up. When Hopper felt her leaving his arms he couldn't help himself. He followed her motion and sat up quickly, pulling her back.

"Hopper, what are you-" she started but he cut her off mid-sentence as he placed his lips on hers in a gentle kiss. It was fairly innocent and made Joyce lightheaded. She returned the kiss slowly, parting her lips and allowing her hands to travel to the back of his neck, grasping slightly at his hair. Breathing him in, again, as much as she could. Neither of them broke the spell the kiss had started for at least a few minutes. Hoppers hands found their way to the small of her back, inching her slightly closer to him but his hands never wandered from there. They simply explored each others mouths slowly, almost painfully so, and when they eventually pulled away their eyes met again. They looked at each other almost questioningly. *What now?*

The sounds of their kids from the kitchen eventually made up their minds.

"Let's go and have some breakfast." Joyce finally said, after what seemed like an eternity of silence. She smiled and passed her hand through his hair one last time before letting him go.

"Well alright then." he said and smiled back at her, beaming actually, and as he got up she couldn't help but laugh.

"Hopper, you might put your trousers on before joining our kids out there. We already have to explain the fact that we spent the night in the same bed."

He looked down on himself, and blushed. The fact that they had to go out and face their kids had completely been lost on him until now. He put the pieces of his clothes in the living room and the fact that from what he could hear all kids were awake together and groaned internally at the task awaiting.

"See you out there. I'll take the first blow." Joyce said and squeezed his hand as she walked by him and left the bedroom.

Joyce made a point of entering the kitchen first, and alone, as she was sure she could deal with the kid's scrutiny way better than Hopper. That man might be tall and strong, but in some areas he blushed harder than she could ever recall herself doing. And the fact that it was not as easy as to say that they were boyfriend and girlfriend made her even more certain she had to do this alone. Kids were curious creatures, and they had every right to be.

"Good morning everyone." she said calmly as she entered the kitchen and grabbed a mug to pour herself some coffee. Had to make it fast if she was going to get some coffee in her before they mustered the courage to ask her something. Will and Eleven were seated at the table, heads close together, as Jonathan was making pancakes. Before any of her children had a chance to say good morning, and just as she took her first sip, Eleven said:

"Where is Hopper?"

This earned her a quiet giggle from Will and nothing at all from Jonathan. Quite an innocent question, but still loaded with something else considering the circumstances. She was completely sure the girl knew the answer to that question.

"Hopper is getting dressed, he'll be out soon and join us." she replied. In her experience, when children were curious the best way to feed their curiosity was to give them honest and direct answers which couldn't be misinterpreted.

"Why did he sleep here? Wasn't Eleven supposed to go home last night?" asked Will, now clearly eager to get to it as Eleven had already cleared the air.

"Yes, Eleven was supposed to go home but Hopper got here so late that you were both asleep already. And as he had been out all day he was tired, and cold. So I offered him to stay here. You don't mind that your one night sleepover turned into two, right?" she said, looking Will and Eleven directly in the eyes as if challenging them to complain over the extra time they got to spend together.

"No. Maybe now I can sleep here every night?" Eleven suggested and gave Will a look which made him stifle a giggle. Even Joyce raised an eyebrow at the girl's cheek, she really was coming out of her shell.

"We'll see about that honey." she replied with a smile. She ruffled Will's hair, satisfied that her job with the two of them was done and headed over to the stove where Jonathan was silently making pancake after pancake. He stiffened as she put a hand on his shoulder and she felt worried as she saw his stern expression.

"Jonathan, is everything alright?" she asked, suddenly concerned that something was going on with him that she didn't know about. She often felt her older son carried all the worries in the world on his shoulders.

"I'm fine mom." he replied, although he clearly didn't mean it.

"Jonathan, come on. You can talk to me." she insisted, hating the fact that her son didn't want to let her in.

"Really, it's nothing. It's none of my business anyway." he said and glanced in Hopper's direction, who had just entered the kitchen and was giving El and Will a big hug.

Joyce looked at her son eyeing Hopper like he was the new plague and suddenly realized what was making him so sullen this morning. She decided against making a scene of it now and gave Jonathan a smile as she offered him to sit down and eat while she took over the pancake making. He allowed her to take over for him but instead of sitting down he left the kitchen with a nod and the excuse that he had already eaten and headed for his room. Hopper gave Joyce a concerned look from where he was sitting but she didn't know how to respond to him so she simply shrugged her shoulders and kept on making pancakes. She would have to talk to Jonathan later but as of now she was starving. Breakfast first, then serious conversation. Hopper felt a sense of relief that Jonathan had excused himself, even if it confirmed his suspicion that he wasn't happy about the nature of the relationship he was starting to develop with his mother. He was also relieved that Joyce had apparently cleared the air with the other kids, as they both seemed to casually eat away at their pancakes without a worry in the world. Two out of three, in less than five minutes. *That woman is a wonder*, he thought to himself. They spent the next hour or so eating, laughing and talking over the table. At one moment Joyce and El were caught up in laughter over something neither he or Will seemed to understand, the younger boy repeatedly asking "guys come on, what's so funny?", and as Hopper rolled his eyes at them he felt a strange feeling starting to form in his chest. A sense of belonging and calm that he hadn't felt in a long time. When the time finally came to take El home he lingered with the goodbye, almost scared to let Joyce out of his sight in case what he felt would disappear into thin air. He also didn't know how to say goodbye to her. A kiss? A hug? Nothing at all? In the end Eleven had to practically drag him out of there. She was already halfway to the car when he finally hugged Joyce goodbye, deciding that kissing in front of the kids was probably a bit mature for the time being. As Will ventured back into the house and Eleven was preoccupied with getting the car door open Joyce took a few steps out on the porch, caught Hopper and grabbed a hold of his hand, squeezing it tightly. He gave her a knowing look and smiled. He couldn't wait to see her again.